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Review of "Camilla Bettoni Antonia Rubino. Emigrazione e comportamento linguistico. Un'indagine sul trilinguismo dei siciliani e dei veneti in Australia (Sociolinguistica e dialettologia, 7. Galatina: Congedo, 1996. 226 p.)"

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Journal Article

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yet we must also recognize that there is a linguistic Darwinism at work. Surely one must take into consideration the fact that the survival of smaller languages is reminiscent of the survival of the fittest.

Ladefoged (1992) expresses my sentiments in discussing Dahalo, a Cushitic language of Kenya with a few hundred native speakers. He tells of asking an informant if his sons spoke Dahalo. The father responded that he was proud that they did not. They spoke only Swahili, and thus, to him, their native language was a symbol of prestige and opportunity.

One must also keep in mind the following perspective on the somewhat bizarre notion of a 'killer language', eloquently phrased by Ladefoged: 'Of course I am no more in favor of genocide or repression of minorities than I am of people dying of tuberculosis or starving through ignorance' (1992: 810). I should hasten to add that languages do not kill other languages. People do.

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Notes

1. The writer tells us that this term was invented in 1991 by Anne Pakir.

References

- Ladefoged, Peter
1992 Another view of endangered languages. *Language* 68, 809-811.

Camilla Bettoni and Antonia Rubino, *Emigrazione e comportamento linguistico. Un'indagine sul trilinguismo dei siciliani e dei veneti in Australia*. Sociolinguistica e dialettologia, 7. Galatina: Congedo, 1996. 226 p.

Over the last hundred years or so, the emigration of about 25 million Italians has had a profound impact on the social structure of various countries (mainly the U.S.A., Argentina, Australia and several European countries), as well as creating quite interesting phenomena of language contact. The purpose of the book under review is precisely to achieve a better understanding of the linguistic behavior of migrants and, in particular, to explore the factors which determine the maintenance or the loss of the 'ethnic' languages in the new environment. The authors, Camilla Bettoni and

Antonia Rubino, share extensive research activity within the Italo-Australian community. In this contribution, they mainly report on a new empirical investigation among Italian immigrants in Sydney, but the interest of their work goes far beyond the mere illustration of a particular sociolinguistic case study and contributes to a general theory of language in emigration, since the results are discussed in the light of the copious literature which exists both on the community languages in Australia and on Italian immigrants in several parts of the world. The book is organised into six chapters: 1) *Introduzione*, 2) *Metodologia*, 3) *Analisi*, 4) *Discussione*, 5) *Confronti*, and 6) *Conclusione*; it is completed by two appendices, which contain the questionnaire used and a number of tables with some data obtained in the investigation.

The introductory chapter presents the Italian community in Australia and the theoretical framework of the study. Nowadays, the majority of Italians who live in Australia (more than half a million) were born there; the main wave of immigration took place in the decades after World War II. The social structure of the community is characterized by the fact that the immigrants mainly come from a small number of regions in Italy and have settled in a few states of Australia. This concentration has led to the formation within the general Italian community of particular subgroups determined by the common regional origin of their members; the ethnic character of these communities is reinforced by a high degree of endogamy. All the subjects investigated in this study originally came from Sicily or Veneto. These two groups are of particular interest from a sociolinguistic perspective, mainly because of the strong role of dialects in their regions; therefore, the linguistic background of the speakers is not based on Italian monolingualism, but rather on a diglossic repertoire, in which Italian (as the high variety) is accompanied by a low dialectal variety. Thus, Bettoni's and Rubino's interest is not only directed towards the way in which the overall language shift from the ethnic varieties to English takes place, but also towards the more specific development of the original diglossia which opposes the Italian language to the Sicilian and Veneto dialects.

The theoretical framework of the study has its foundations in the issues raised by the 'classical' sociology of language (à la Fishman 1973): who speaks which language to whom, when, and for which purposes? The technique used to elicit such information is the oral interview, strictly based on a pre-established questionnaire, in line with the general quantitative and correlational approach. The questions concern 12 independent variables (such as sex, age, education, linguistic competence, etc.) and 59 dependent variables, most of them designed to investigate the use of the three varieties of the repertoire English, Italian, and dialect according to a number of parameters (domain, situation, interlocutor, topic, etc.). Obviously, the authors are aware of the criticisms that have repeatedly been raised against

the use of questionnaires in the social sciences (people's behavior often differs from what they believe or claim it to be); nevertheless, they reasonably assume that the answers reflect at least the intentions and attitudes of the speakers, elements that have proved to be of crucial importance both for the process of language shift in particular and for situations of language contact in general.

The sample consists of 202 subjects and may be considered representative, in that it is equally distributed from the viewpoint of the major independent variables: the first and second generations are represented by 101 subjects (exactly 50%) each, and the same holds true for the parameters 'regional origin' (101 informants come from Sicily and 101 from Veneto) and 'sex' (102 women as opposed to 100 men); an almost equal distribution is also obtained if one crosses these major variables. As regards the use of the three language varieties, the overall picture which arises from the data is a general language shift from the original dialect (Sicilian or Veneto spoken by first-generation immigrants) towards English, which is mostly used by the second generation. The Italian high variety already has a weak position in the first generation's repertoire, whereas its use decreases only slightly among the second generation; in the long run, it seems that the dialects will be abandoned before Italian.

The language preferences of the two generations clearly emerge from their declarations about soliloquy: 73 percent of the first generation speak to themselves in dialect, whereas 93 percent of the second generation indicate the use of English for such situations. The language shift already begins in the first generation, and English is widely spoken even within the family. However, there are considerable differences according to different domains (such as family, school, etc.). The family code *par excellence*, the dialect, is only rarely used outside the family, mainly for communication with interlocutors of the same regional origin. The choice of Italian is favored in interaction with Italians from other regions, as well as in the somewhat formal domains, i.e., with shopkeepers and Italian professionals (such as doctors, lawyers, priests, etc.). Quite obviously, English is the dominant language at work and at school.

Nevertheless, the choice of one language or another is not simply determined by the type of communicative situation, but rather by a variety of factors. For instance, a multiple linear regression analysis reveals that the use of dialect within the family is, above all, favored by the variables 'generation', 'sex', and 'age' (i.e., older women of the first generation are most likely to speak dialect in this situation). Outside of family, however, women use less dialect than men, and therefore exhibit a more normative pattern of behavior from the point of view of the original Italian diglossia. The same holds true for Veneto speakers as opposed to Sicilians: the former

speak more dialect in the family, but use it less in public domains. Other factors, such as the topic or the place where the communicative event takes place, seem to be less decisive for language choice.

An interesting aspect of this book lies in the fact that the results are compared with those of studies on different community languages in Australia, as well as with the development of the Italian language in other migrant contexts, in particular the U.S.A., Canada, Latin America and some European countries. Within Australian society, a number of factors seem to favor the maintenance of Italian ethnic varieties, among which we might quote the high density of Italian settlements in some areas, the great cultural distance from the Anglo-Celtic group (in particular, the strength of values such as family cohesion, which plays a major role in language maintenance, together with the high degree of endogamy already mentioned), and – last, but not least – the open-minded Australian policy of multiculturalism, promoting the so-called ‘community languages’ through education programs and other government action (cf. Clyne 1991).

The importance of this last factor can be estimated if one compares the Australian experience with Italian immigration in Northern America, where – regardless of the greater consistency of the ethnic group – the language shift has proceeded much faster, probably due to greater assimilationist pressure. On the other hand, in some European countries – for instance, in German-speaking Switzerland (cf. Schmid 1993) – the Italian language is better conserved among the second generation; conversely, in these contexts, the dialects are more easily abandoned. Consequently, Bettoni and Rubino conclude that, in the Italo-Australian community, the language shift is taking place at an intermediate pace; in the long run, the Sicilian and Veneto dialects will disappear, since a form of bilingualism composed of the two standard languages, English and Italian, will have a greater likelihood of survival. However, as the authors themselves point out, in the case of migrant communities, predictions of language development are always very difficult to formulate, given the variety of factors which come into play.

For obvious reasons of space, only a small part of the wealth of interesting data discussed can be hinted at here. To sum up, the work of Bettoni and Rubino must be considered exemplary for future research on the linguistic behavior of migrants, since it provides us – on the basis of a very careful research design – with an exhaustive analysis of all the variables that must be taken into account. Also, the comparative perspective proves to be very fruitful. In more general terms, this book also confirms that the ‘traditional’ sociology of language still has useful concepts and methods to offer to the study of migrant languages.